

# A Report on Beijing Plus 10: Celebrating Gains, Facing New Challenges

The following is a condensed version of the Report of Philippines NGOs entitled Beijing Plus 10: Celebrating Gains, Facing New Challenges coordinated by Jeanne Frances Illo and Rosalinda Pineda Ofreneo. The Report was supported by a grant from the United Nations Population Fund, Social Watch and the Women's Studies Association of the Philippines.

**Condensed by Ma. Victoria R. Raquiza\***

## Introduction

Women from 75 organizations came together in 2004 to take stock of the life of the Filipino woman 10 years after the UN Fourth World Conference on Women in Beijing. Earlier in the year, the University of the Philippines (UP) Center for Women's Studies (UPCWS) and the Department of Women and Development Studies of the UP College of Social Work and Community Development organized an NGO-academe workshop to provide a preliminary assessment of the status of women, especially in preparation for the Asia-Pacific NGO Forum which was held in Bangkok in July 2004. In August of that same year, these two offices linked up with the Institute for Social Studies and Action (ISSA) and the National Commission on the Role of Filipino Women (NCRFW) to cosponsor the National GO-NGO Consultation on the Beijing Platform for Action (BPA) in time for the UN Economic and Social Commission for Asia and the Pacific (ESCAP).<sup>1</sup>

While these two initiatives helped provide a substantive reading of the status of Filipino women 10 years after Beijing, there was a sense among the women involved for the need of an assessment independent of the Philippine government's. Such a perspective was seen as valid on several levels: (1) at the international level, an NGO Report to the UN Commission on the Status of Women and General Assembly Sessions could provide an assessment of the gains and gaps from an unadulterated citizen's perspective (2) at the local level, an independent NGO report was critical, especially in light of major differences in approach between the government and women NGOs to the BPA areas of concern. In particular, the issue of women's health was a sore point, with many women critical of the Philippine government's positioning in relation to reproductive rights and services.

The process of hammering out a coherent and comprehensive NGO assessment of the BPA in the context of the Philippines also helped provide a venue for women to come together and to negotiate a policy analysis that highlights their areas of convergence – and divergence. The principle of inclusiveness among the women facilitated the space for each one to contribute to the process, and to “negotiate differences as far as possible and respect diversity when inevitable.”<sup>2</sup>

As such, the Beijing + 10 Celebrating Gains, Facing New Challenges Report of NGOs speaks to various audiences: principally the Philippine NGO community, a fount of aspirations and policy agenda for fundamental change; the government, whom it engages and who will hopefully respond to the Report; and an international audience, where Philippine NGO inputs can help shape the empowerment discourse for women in developing countries.

## The Process

The Report comprises a series of short reports on each of the 12 areas of concern of the BPA. The report for each area of concern:

- Frames the review within the discussion of the particular BPA area, the Philippine Plan of Action to implement the BPA, and NGO agenda and priorities;
- Analyzes the context of compliance (or lack of it) in terms of macro and sector-specific trends or changes that have occurred since 1995. Of particular interest are shifts in political and policy commitments that have affected programs, ser-

<sup>1</sup> Ofreneo, Rosalinda and Jeanne Frances I. Illo. 2005. "Introduction." Philippine NGO Beijing+10 Report, p.1.

<sup>2</sup> Ibid., p. 2.

\* Currently the Coordinator of the Global Call to Action Against Poverty (GCAP) in the Philippines.

vices, and budgets in certain sectors, as what happened in the area of women's health;

- Tracks the changes in women's lives, paying attention to the diversity among women's situations. Whenever possible, sweeping statements about how Filipino women and girls fared during the decade following the Beijing Conference were avoided. Instead, references are offered to how changes have been experienced by women according to resource status, location (urban or rural), ethnicity, region and points of diversity. In some areas, however, there is little information that can make such a nuanced reading possible;

- Critically analyzes government compliance with the BPA, noting both gains and gaps, and stressing the importance in some cases of collaboration between government and NGOs;

- Celebrates the various contributions of NGOs to the implementation of the BPA, stressing some of the exemplary practices that promote women's empowerment;

- Explores the lessons from the past decade of BPA implementation, and the challenges or emerging issues that face both government and NGOs.<sup>3</sup>

Of course, as with any NGO initiative, the Report can only speak in behalf of those who participated in this project. Given the breadth and diversity of the Philippine women's movement, especially those who also engaged the Beijing + 10 review process, it is important to recognize that there are other legitimate NGO voices outside this report. From the perspective of the women behind this project, these other voices and perspectives are welcome additions to the rich diversity and vibrancy of the Philippine women's movement.

This paper is a condensed version of the "Beijing + 10: Celebrating Gains, Facing New Challenges Report of NGOs, with focus on three major areas of concern: women in poverty, women and education, and women and health. Social Watch-Philippines participated in this initiative consistent with its mandate to monitor the outcome and impact of the Beijing processes – part of its abiding commitment to promote women's empowerment. In this, Social Watch recognizes the importance of the Beijing Conference in facilitating such empowerment.

<sup>3</sup> Ibid., pp. 2-3.

<sup>4</sup> Narito, Zone, Marivic Raquiza, Aurora Regalado, Jocelyn Cajiuat, Daryl Leyesa, and Rosalinda Pineda Ofreneo. 2005. "Women and Poverty." Philippine NGO Beijing+10 Report. February 2005. p. 1.



### Women and poverty

At the level of policy rhetoric, there is a wealth of official documentation that gives priority to an anti-poverty agenda, including one for poor women. These are the following: the Philippine Plan for Gender-Responsive Development, 1995-2025 (which provides the policy platform for addressing the issues of women in poverty), the Framework Plan for Women, 2001-2004 (which focused on three areas of concern: women's economic empowerment, protecting and advancing women's rights and advancing gender-responsive governance), the Philippine Agenda 21, 1996, (which focused on sustainable development and identified poverty reduction as a priority), and the Medium-Term Philippine Development Plan (MTPDP) 1993-1998 (which called for structural reforms to make local enterprises globally competitive through liberalization and deregulation of trade and investments, among others). The government also created the National Anti-Poverty Commission (NAPC) to "oversee, coordinate and monitor the poverty reduction efforts of the entire Philippine government"<sup>4</sup> and to promote the development of microfinance that will improve the asset base of households and expand the access of the poor to savings. Women are represented in the Commission. According to the Report, "only last year, the Macapagal-Arroyo Administration drew up a 10-point agenda, described as BEAT-THE-ODDS, which supposedly gives priority to the following: a balanced budget, education for all, automated elections, transport all over the country, conclusion of the peace process with all rebel groups, opportunities for employment, decentralized development,

the decongestion of Metro Manila, promotion of Subic Bay Freeport in Zambales and Clark in Pampanga; cutting of the 34-percent poverty incidence by half (17 percent) by 2010; and the creation of 6 to 10 million jobs<sup>5</sup>.

**Government compliance with the BPA Strategic Objective A1: Review, adopt and maintain macroeconomic policies and development strategies that address the needs and efforts of women in poverty.**

The Report emphasizes that "Despite the plethora of policy pronouncements against poverty, poverty incidence remains high and is, in fact, one of the highest in South East Asia."<sup>6</sup> Across administrations, the government's development agenda continues to be grounded on standard structural adjustment prescriptions that have promoted indiscriminate trade liberalization, privatization and deregulation. Expansion of the private sector in the delivery of essential services (e.g. power, water, transportation), reduction of public investment in social services (health, education, welfare) and strategies favoring foreign investment characterize government strategy.

The Medium-Term Philippine Investment Plan, 2005-2010, indicates where resources will be channeled in the next few years: P2.2 trillion to infrastructure for transport (bridges and roads), power (power generation and transmission projects) and water (construction of potable water supplies nationwide), which is open to foreign and local investments amounting to P400 million a year. Other than merely stating that it plans to generate 6 to 10 million jobs, "the MTPIP does not prioritize investment in the social sector (like education and health)."<sup>7</sup>

Other laws passed have proven detrimental to the poor and to women: the Agriculture and Fisheries Modernization Act of 1997, which purports to modernize agriculture, pushes high-technology agriculture (e.g. agrochemicals and pesticides) which threatens subsistence agriculture, food security and the health of agricultural workers. Sustained exposure to chemicals and pesticides has led to respiratory illness and skin diseases among a significant number of farmers, many of them women. The High-Value Crops Development Act of 1995 provides incentives to agribusiness corporations (e.g. tax exemptions) which are into export crop production (e.g. cut flowers, vegetables, bananas, and pineapples). According to the Report, "this has resulted in land conversion (from subsistence to export-oriented crops), affecting the food

production of farmers, especially women engaged in subsistence agriculture. Commercial fishing is also favored by the Philippine Fisheries Code of 1998 over securing the livelihood of small and marginal fisherfolk."<sup>8</sup>

Globalization, with its negative impacts on the industry sector (particularly manufacturing) and on agriculture (where there has been a decline), has resulted in layoffs of many workers, and consequently, in the swelling of the urban poor population. In October 2004, unemployment rose to 10.9 percent (affecting about 3.9 million people) and underemployment was at 16.9 percent (about 6.07 million people). In actual terms, this translates to almost one of three Filipino workers being either unemployed or underemployed. The Report revealed that "except in 1999 and 2000, the rates of unemployment among women have been consistently higher by about 3 percentage points compared to men since 1996, indicating gender discrimination in the labor market."<sup>9</sup>

**Filipino women across sectors**

**Women in Agriculture and Fisheries**

The face of poverty in the Philippines is that of a rural woman. Rural poverty is mostly caused by lack of access to productive resources. That land distribution has benefited only a few women is reflected by available data, which show that only 34.8 percent of total agrarian reform beneficiaries (ARBs) and 37.9 percent of holders of individual patents and certificates of land ownership agreements are women. Women are also discriminated against in the provision of government services and trainings. Data from the Department of Agriculture show that from 1996-2001, women accounted for only 27.6 percent of total rice-farmer-recipient, 35.3 percent of corn-farmer-recipient and 7.2 percent of livestock-operator-recipient.

As the Report states, "in the fisheries sector, women's work is largely invisible. Of the total employed, only 8.2 percent consisted of women, going down further to 6.3 percent in 2002. While men fishers are primarily involved in catching fish, women are very much engaged in pre- and post-fishing activities. They undertake 50 to 70 percent

<sup>5</sup> Villanueva, Marichu. 2005. "2.2-T RP Development Program." The Philippine Star. 9 January 2005.

<sup>6</sup> Narito, Z., M. Raquiza, A. Regalado, J. Cajiua, D. Leyesa, and R. Pineda Ofreneo. 2005. "Women and Poverty." Philippine NGO Beijing+10 Report. February 2005. p. 2.

<sup>7</sup> Ibid., p. 2.

<sup>8</sup> Ibid., p. 2.

<sup>9</sup> Ibid., p. 4

of local fish processing and marketing. They also mend nets and tend the fishing equipment, among others.... yet they hardly appear in official statistics."<sup>10</sup>

#### Indigenous Women/Muslim Women

Disaggregating the poverty situation across regions and provinces would reveal that "poverty incidence is on the uptick, particularly in the Autonomous Region of Muslim Mindanao, Central Mindanao and virtually stagnant for Western Mindanao,"<sup>11</sup> according to the Report. The Muslims (or Moros as they prefer to call themselves) bear the brunt of socioeconomic marginalization, landlessness, poor access to social services and development aggression. Some traditions and practices in Muslim communities have worsened the condition and position of women and girls. The never-ending armed conflict in Mindanao, which continues to eat up scarce resources, has intensified the sufferings of the locals, especially women and children.

The Cordillera region, home to a significant population of indigenous peoples, also "has one of the highest poverty incidences (42.5 percent),"<sup>12</sup> according to the Report. The liberalization of agriculture and mining, the introduction of monoculture and the way tourism is promoted, have damaged the environment and sustainable livelihood, and led to the conversion of land to high-value crops at the expense of staple crops and the displacement of indigenous communities from their ancestral domain; as well as increased out-migration and informal sector community among poor women.<sup>13</sup> Apart from worsening poverty, social exclusion and discrimination of indigenous peoples also occur from official



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development planning processes that are blind to the specific needs and interests of these peoples.

#### Migrant women workers

The Philippines is now the second biggest labor-sending country in the world. Statistics obtained by the Report from the Philippine Overseas Employment Administration (POEA) reveal that of the roughly "7.8 million Filipinos abroad: 2.9 million are permanent residents, 3.4 million are migrant workers, and 1.5 million are irregular aliens. In 1992, the feminization of migration was once again underscored when 69 percent of migrants comprised women, up from 54 percent in 1996, but most of whom were domestic helpers, caregivers and entertainers."<sup>14</sup>

According to the Report, the main factors that encourage more and more women to work abroad are:

- 1) official migration policies in which recruitment of women is actively promoted through various government units, in collaboration with recruitment agencies,
- 2) growing poverty that has resulted in landlessness and rural impoverishment, pushing more rural women to seek livelihood abroad,
- 3) lack of opportunities for local employment that would enhance women's skills, and help them attain better jobs and a more secure future for them and their families,
- 4) the demand for the qualities of Filipino women in many developed countries,
- 5) the tendency in destination countries to relegate domestic work to hired help, and
- 6) normalization of prostitution in the sex industry, often disguised as "entertainment" work.<sup>15</sup>

#### Women in the informal sector

As industry and agriculture are in the doldrums, the service sector picks up the slack in terms of employment provision. Within the service sector,

<sup>10</sup> In Formanes, Belinda. 2004. "The Impact of AFTA on Small Men and Women Producers in the Philippines." Unpublished report.

<sup>11</sup> See Social Watch Philippines, 2004. "Civil Society Report on the Status of Millennium Development Goals in the Philippines. Quezon City.

<sup>12</sup> In Chavez-Malaluan, Jenina Joy. n.d. "The Challenge of Poverty Eradication in the Philippines." Unpublished paper.

<sup>13</sup> See Josef, Jennifer C. 1999. "Women of the Highlands and Survival in the Margins." In J. I. Ilo and R. Pineda Ofreneo, eds. *Carrying the Burden of the World: Women Reflecting on the Effects of the Crisis on Women and Girls*. Quezon City: Center for Integrative and Development Studies, University of the Philippines. pp. 85-98.

<sup>14</sup> See Philippine Overseas Employment Administration, 2003. "Stock Estimate of Overseas Filipinos as of December 2003." [www.poea.gov.ph](http://www.poea.gov.ph).

<sup>15</sup> Narito, Z., M. Raquiza, A. Regalado, J. Cajiuat, Daryl Leyesa, and Rosalinda Pineda Ofreneo. 2005. "Women and Poverty." Philippine NGO Beijing+10 Report. February 2005. p. 5.

however, many workers are found in the informal sector (at 20 million or 65 percent of total employed in 2003) – this according to data from the National Statistics Office (NSO).<sup>16</sup> Women comprise almost half of those in the informal sector and are found in the following areas: home-based work (subcontract work in garments, and the like); microenterprise (e.g. small grocery stores), ambulant vending of food and other wares in the urban setting, domestic work and/or laundry work, and agricultural work. They combine their domestic chores with income-generating work that is usually meager and is marked by a lack of social protection.



### Women Industrial Workers

The Report states that 80 percent of more than 900,000 workers in 62 export processing zones are women, and are concentrated in the electronics industry (which comprises three-fourths of Philippine exports). Being contractual workers, many of these women have no job security and become vulnerable to occupational hazards (e.g. sexual harassment, occupational health safety). With the closure of many garment firms, especially with the termination of the Multi-Fiber Agreement in 2004 and the nonresumption of the Philippine quota, women in the garments industry now face job uncertainty. Since the mid-1990s, the garments industry has been declining owing to stiff competition in both the global and local markets.

Trade unions have weakened in the last decade or so, since many trade union members have lost regular work under the onslaught of globalization. Women's participation in trade unions has also declined from 59.6 percent in 1996 to 34.2

percent in 2000. The Report noted that women's share of union leadership "plummeted from 35 percent in 1998 to 25.6 percent in 2000."<sup>17</sup>

### 2005 budget allocation: anti-poor, anti-women

The 2005 national budget stands at P907.6 billion – much bigger than last year's budget of P865 billion. As has been the case for several years now, debt service enjoys the biggest budgetary allocation at 33 percent (or P301.7 billion). This represents 81 percent of government revenues in 2004. "Given the bulk of debt servicing, very little remains for other allocations."<sup>18</sup> Compare this to education (which under the Philippine Constitution should have the largest share), which gets only P135 billion. A decline in the budget for health has been noted, "from an already low of 3 percent in 1997 to 1.9 percent in 2002—a truly shameful development."<sup>19</sup> In truth, a large part of health costs are borne by clients themselves. Culturally, since women primarily bear the responsibility of caring for the sick in the family and community, it is their pockets that are emptied. Often, if funds are not enough, women have had to resort to borrowing.

The Report states that the Department of Social Welfare and Development, which takes care of women living in poverty and in especially difficult circumstances (e.g. rape survivors, child abuse victims and other forms of gender violence), gets not even half of one percent of the national budget. Despite the government claim that it has set up daycare centers in 89 percent of the country's 41,943 barangays, "child care continues to be problematic as these centers only provide a few hours of learning for preschool children, if at all."<sup>20</sup>

The target share of 5 percent of the national budget for gender and development programs (more popularly known as the Gender and Development (GAD) budget) has yet to be substantially realized. In 2001, at least 132 agencies submitted GAD plans amounting to P2.8 billion – way below the projected target. But in November 2004, "while the number of submissions had risen to 162

<sup>16</sup> In National Statistics Office. 2004. "Labor Force Statistics." April 2004. [www.census.gov.ph](http://www.census.gov.ph).

<sup>17</sup> See National Commission on the Role of Filipino Women. 1998. "Fact Sheet No.3, 1998" Manila:NCRFW.

<sup>18</sup> Narito, Z., M. Raquiza, A. Regalado, J. Cajjuat, D. Leyesa, and R. Pineda Ofreno. 2005. "Women and Poverty." Philippine NGO Beijing+10 Report. February 2005. p. 5.

<sup>19</sup> See National Commission on the Role of Filipino Women. 2004. "State of the Filipino Women Report. 2001-2003." Manila:NCRFW. p. 44.

<sup>20</sup> Narito, Z., M. Raquiza, A. Regalado, J. Cajjuat, D. Leyesa, and R. Pineda Ofreno. 2005. "Women and Poverty." Philippine NGO

agencies, the total gender budget went down to P2 billion due to budgetary restrictions in the context of a looming fiscal crisis."<sup>21</sup>

It must be noted that a major reason for the lack of resources for development is pervasive corruption in government. "Estimates of income leakages due to corruption and inefficiencies range from a low of P48 billion per year, to a high of P250 billion,"<sup>22</sup> the Report revealed.

Lack of funds for social spending generally translates into limited access of poor children to quality education and health care, among others. As usual, women of poor families will bear the burden of scrounging for resources to ensure the health and well-being of their families. As the Report states, limited social welfare and GAD budgets will constrain women's efforts to address gender-based violence and promote women's interests through institutional mechanisms.

### **A.2. Revise laws and administrative practices to ensure women's equal rights and access to economic resources**

There are 23 laws that promote women's empowerment, but most of these support women in the formal labor sector. Only three laws support microenterprises for women in the informal sector: the first provides credit assistance, the second is geared towards strengthening small- and medium-scale enterprises (also known as the Magna Carta for Small Enterprises), and the third establishes microfinance as a strategy for poverty reduction. Despite these laws, none have brought relief to women in poverty. Implementation has been hamstrung by stringent requirements, or by interest charges that negatively affect poor women's access to these programs.

### **A.3. Provide women with access to savings and credit mechanisms and institutions.**

Microfinance was introduced in the Philippines in 1993, as part of the government's anti-poverty programs. In recent times, however, the discourse has shifted from providing credit to the poor to ensuring institutional financial viability. Some practitioners even assert that "their operations do not, and cannot... serve the ultra-poor."<sup>23</sup> Others also claim that microfinance should cater only to the "entrepreneurial poor" because not everyone can be an entrepreneur. All this implies that many poor women are excluded from the radar of microfinance providers, such as new agrarian reform beneficiaries who be need credit in order to finance their business.

While pushing a social development agenda, the government is likewise encouraging privatization and further commercialization through Executive Order 38, which limits the affordable credit that government agencies can provide to the ultra-poor. The EO has also allowed microfinance institutions (MFIs) to issue skyrocketing interest rates, especially since there are hardly any countervailing measures to curb such abuse.

By end-2003 some one million borrowers, mostly women, had availed themselves of credit through MFIs. Despite this, gender concerns were not reflected in the core business of the providers, nor in their policies, standards, and norms governing microfinance.

### **A.4. Develop gender-based methodologies and conduct research to address the feminization of poverty (BPA 1995).**

Women and Poverty Studies: Despite numerous studies on women and poverty in the last decade, a gender-responsive framework for macro-studies on poverty still has to be generated. In using the household as the unit of analysis, studies have to go beyond gender disaggregation of data, and look at the gender dynamics within the family in order to have a better grasp of the situation of both women and men.

Women and Microfinance: While indicators to measure financial sustainability have been developed by MFIs, indicators that will measure poverty alleviation, women's empowerment and the impact of microfinance on women still need to be developed. Moreover, MFIs should use sex-disaggregated data in their recording and information systems.

Monitoring Poverty Indicators: Inconsistencies in government data on poverty have raised the need to adjust the methodology for poverty assessment. Caution has to be taken, however, against simply painting a picture that is more "politically palatable."<sup>24</sup>

### **Some gains and NGO initiatives**

Various NGOs and networks have conducted sustained advocacy campaigns on issues of trade

<sup>21</sup> NCRFW. 2004. "State of the Filipino Women Report. 2001-2003."

<sup>22</sup> Narito, Z., M. Raquiza, A. Regalado, J. Cajjuat, D. Leyesa, and R. Pineda Ofreneo. 2005. "Women and Poverty." Philippine NGO Beijing+10 Report. February 2005. p. 3.

<sup>23</sup> Miranda, Marcia. 2004. "Microfinance Policy Review." Microfinance Towards Financial Sustainability, Poverty Reduction and Women's Empowerment. Research report submitted to the National Commission on the Role of Filipino Women by PUNLA sa Tao Foundation. Manila.

<sup>24</sup> Narito, Z., M. Raquiza, A. Regalado, J. Cajjuat, D. Leyesa, and R. Pineda Ofreneo. 2005. "Women and Poverty." Philippine NGO Beijing+10 Report. February 2005. p. 6.

liberalization, privatization and deregulation and its negative impact on the poor, especially on women. Social movements have critiqued corporate-driven globalization defined by the developed countries through multilateral bodies like the World Trade Organization. The free-market economic reforms pushed by the International Monetary Fund- World Bank are directed at (1) boosting the investment climate through the elimination of trade and investment regulations, and (2) reducing government deficits through cuts in spending, usually with social services bearing the deepest budgetary cuts. The Women's March Against Poverty and Globalization, a huge network of women of various shades in the political spectrum, have sought to dramatize the link between local poverty experienced by women and structural and global issues that reinforce and reproduce poverty.

In 2003, the National Rural Women's Congress was born, gathering some 300 women NGOs, and it pushed for the rights of rural women to: "1) landownership under the agrarian reform program; 2) ownership of ancestral land on the part of indigenous women; 3) fishery and coastal resources; 4) safe and potable water, food security, and basic services; 5) representation in the management of and implementation of gender and development programs, and 6) reproductive health and freedom from violence."<sup>25</sup> In particular, the passage of the Anti-Trafficking Law in 2003, advocated by migrant and women's groups, is a step forward for the protection of women as it provides for stiff penalties. It also mandates that certain provisions be provided to the trafficked persons (e.g. emergency shelter, counseling, free medical, psychological and legal services, livelihood and skills-training, and educational assistance). NGOs have achieved gains from years of community organizing to form partnerships with grassroots and locally-based people's organizations towards food self-sufficiency. The Report then cites concrete examples of specific NGO projects that have met these objectives.

### Concluding Remarks

Macro-economic policies and programs need to be challenged, since all evidence points to increasing poverty and deepening vulnerability for women today. The Report states that NGOs "should strengthen their role as critics of corporate-driven globalization and advocate for policy reforms"<sup>26</sup> (e.g. debt, indiscriminate trade liberalization, privatization of public utilities, and cutbacks in social services crucial to the well-being of women and their

families). As importantly, "good governance must be demanded from policymakers, especially in addressing the issue of wide-scale corruption."<sup>27</sup>

Alternative anti-poverty strategies must be pursued at national and local levels "to generate models that can inspire and be replicated."<sup>28</sup> It is important for these strategies to be culturally-sensitive so that indigenous and Muslim women become significant partners in these processes. Finally, a women's perspective and a gender framework must be integrated in these anti-poverty strategies. To quote the last phrase of the Report, "In the current context of deteriorating standards of living, rising costs, high unemployment levels, a gargantuan national debt burden and runaway fiscal deficit, the collective voice and action of poor women is critical, now more than ever, not only in combating deepening poverty and social exclusion, but also in giving hope for the future."<sup>29</sup>

### Women and education

Education is an important goal by itself and is also a means for women to access various opportunities for empowerment and gain equal status with men. The 1995 Beijing Platform for Action (BPA) outlines six strategic objectives to ensure women's empowerment through education and training:

- 1) equal access to education,
- 2) eradication of illiteracy among women,
- 3) access to vocational training, science and technology, and continuing education,



<sup>25</sup> Ibid., p. 4.

<sup>26</sup> Ibid., p. 5.

<sup>27</sup> Ibid., p. 8.

<sup>28</sup> Ibid., p. 8.

<sup>29</sup> Ibid., p. 8.

4) nondiscriminatory education and training,  
5) adequate resources for education reform,  
and  
6) lifelong education and training for girls and women.<sup>30</sup>

To promote its implementation, the BPA urged governments to incorporate the various elements of these objectives in their development programs.

The Philippine Plan for Gender-Responsive Development (PPGD), 1995-2025, outlines the government's long-term agenda, priorities and strategies for attaining women's empowerment and gender equality, as well as its commitments to the BPA.

## **Government compliance with the BPA**

### **B1. Ensure equal access to education.**

### **B4. Develop nondiscriminatory education and training.**

The PPGD seeks the mobilization of educational institutions to promote gender equality. Educational institutions are encouraged to lead in raising gender consciousness and out of the school communities. Except for certain areas of the country, the issue is not so much "equal access" to education by gender, as it is access to education for females and males particularly in rural and remote areas, the quality of education available, and sexism in the educational system.

The Department of Education (DepEd), the Commission on Higher Education (CHED) and the Technical Educational and Skills Development Authority (TESDA) have been tasked to fulfill the BPA commitments in basic education, higher education and technical-vocational education and training (TVET), respectively. As the Report states, "Among the main efforts are the training of teachers and personnel on GAD issues to eliminate gender stereotyping in textbooks and instructional materials and raise teachers' awareness of gender issues."<sup>31</sup>

At the basic education level, however, sexism still persists in curricular and instructional materials, and in relations between teachers and their supervisors, compounded by the ever-declining quality of education. Gender biases are still manifested consciously or unconsciously, in the practices, language used and classroom strategies of many teachers. Moreover, efforts to combat sexual harassment and violence against girls still need to be stepped up.

Teaching exemplars that integrate nonsexist and gender-fair concepts have been prepared in all learning areas of the revised basic education

curriculum and have been distributed to all pilot schools. Implementation and integration of these in the ongoing teacher training programs still have to be assessed.

There is a proliferation of teacher training and retooling programs, especially the areas of Technology and Livelihood, Science and Mathematics. But as the Report observes, "It is not clear however whether these initiatives have incorporated the GAD core messages."<sup>32</sup> Furthermore, the effectiveness and impact of such training programs as a whole have yet to be measured and evaluated.

At the tertiary education level, among the measures to address gender issues is the integration of GAD, specifically violence against women (VAW), in the medical curriculum of colleges. While such is already integrated in a few colleges, efforts are ongoing to replicate this in all medical schools. CHED is pushing for the production of gender-responsive curricula, textbooks, instructional materials and teaching strategies.

Another government institution helping develop the GAD capacity of academic and research institutions is the Philippine Council for Agriculture, Forestry and Natural Resources Research and Development (PCARRD), which has started a program to mainstream gender in the agriculture and resources development networks. The government, through the NCRFW (National Commission on the Role of Filipino Women) has been collaborating with various NGOs and academic institutions to establish Gender Resource Centers in selected regions.<sup>33</sup>

Many of these initiatives, however, are still limited in scope, confined mainly to universities and colleges that have strong Women's Studies programs or active GAD advocates. Feminist research methodology has been slowly gaining greater acceptance in a number of campuses. These institutions are few, and in most campuses feminism and Women's Studies remain at the margin.

Sobritchea and Guerrero (1999) have noted that "financial support for Women's Studies programs has intensified in recent years"<sup>34</sup>, drawn

<sup>30</sup> Reyes, Zenaida Q. and Jeanne Frances I. Illo. 2005. "Education and Training of Women." Philippine NGO Beijing+10 Report. February 2005. p. 1.

<sup>31</sup> Reyes, Zenaida Q. 2004. "Institutional Policies in Human Rights Education in the Philippines." A research report submitted to the Philippine National University Research Center. May 2004.

<sup>32</sup> Ibid., p. 2.

<sup>33</sup> Ibid., p. 3.

<sup>34</sup> Sobritchea, Carolyn I. and Sylvia Guerrero. 1999. "Women's Studies in the Philippines: 25 Years of Development and Challenge." A paper presented during the International Conference on Building Women's Studies Curriculum in the Philippines. 14-16 July 1999. INNOTECH, Quezon City.

mainly from private foundations, private universities and international aid agencies. But given the cuts in the national budget, government resources for such programs in state colleges and universities are very likely to be drastically slashed, if not totally withdrawn.

**B2. Eradicate illiteracy among women.**  
**B6. Promote lifelong education and training for girls and women.**

Statistics show increasing literacy rates among the younger generations, despite regional disparities and the steadily deteriorating quality of education. Since 2000 the DepEd has supported the training of some public school teachers in implementing a Reading Literacy Program, with the goal of totally eradicating illiteracy among children by 2015. But as the Report states, "These initiatives, however, still fail to solve the problem of illiteracy of older women in the rural areas – the highest among the age cohorts."<sup>35</sup>

The DepEd has reportedly addressed this problem through the holding of functional educational and literacy programs in 10 of the country's sixteen regions. Some regions combine female functional literacy classes with maternal and child health as core content. The DepEd also claims to have alternative nonformal educational programs for indigenous communities. But the Report has misgivings about this: "If reports were to be believed, the government has systems in place to eradicate illiteracy of vulnerable groups of women and girls. However, there is little information on how these programs are being run, what their core messages are regarding gender issues, and how they are affecting women and girls in the communities."<sup>36</sup>

**B3. Improve women's access to vocational training, science and technology, and continuing education.**

TESDA, through its Women's Center, provides women-friendly facilities, such as a day care area and nursery and space for NGO networking. It conducts training in technical skills, social skills and entrepreneurship, research and advocacy. It also offers career guidance and job placement assistance. TESDA has more women graduates in "women's" trades than in mainstream, nontraditional courses such as welding, general electronics and air-conditioning. It also runs community-based training programs which, in 2004, served 20 depressed areas, trained 9,023 women and out-of-school youth, assisted 1,089 women through its

microfinancing program, and aided 55 "entrepinay" organizations through trade fairs and exhibits.<sup>37</sup>

Enrolment figures for TESDA, however, reveal only 150,000 students a year – a mere 10 percent of total TVET enrolment. Private schools account for 90 percent of the total enrolment statistics. Little is known about the programs of the private technical and vocational schools, or how these institutions deal with gender issues.

**B5. Allocate sufficient resources for and monitor the implementation of education reforms.**

Because of the small budget, commitment to education is still rhetoric. In fact, there are two alarming trends: the basic education budget is growing too slowly relative to the population growth rate; while funds for state institutions of higher education and TESDA, have been declining. These suggest a withdrawal of support for education by the current administration.<sup>38</sup>

**Women and Health**

Women's health is a priority issue of the BPA, as reflected in the five strategic objectives for women and health. Reproductive health rights of women and gender equity concerns are considered integral to women's advancement and national development. The BPA calls on governments, NGOs and civil society groups to take strategic action on "inequalities and inadequacies in and unequal access to health care and services."<sup>39</sup>



<sup>35</sup> Reyes, Z. Q. and J. F. Illo. 2005. "Education and Training of Women." Philippine NGO Beijing+10 Report. February 2005. p. 3.

<sup>36</sup> Ibid., p. 3.

<sup>37</sup> In Government-NGO Consultative Workshop on Beijing +10 Review, 22-23 August 2004.

<sup>38</sup> Reyes, Z. Q. and J. F. Illo. 2005. "Education and Training of Women." Philippine NGO Beijing+10 Report. February 2005. p. 3.

<sup>39</sup> Guerrero, Sylvia H. 2005. "Women and Health." Philippine NGO Beijing+10 Report. February 2005. p. 1.

While the 2004 Report to the Nation of the NCRFW notes gains made in the areas of women's economic empowerment, the upholding of women's and girl's human rights and the strengthening of gender-responsive governance, it admits that the country faces a major setback in the critical areas of reproductive and sexual health rights. As of 2003, the fertility rate of Filipino women aged 15-49 years rated at 3.5 (higher than that in other Asian countries), while the women's desired fertility rate was 2.7. Statistics from the 2001 State of the Philippine Population Report reveal that 20 percent of married women had unmet needs in family planning. The reproductive health program, according to the Population Commission, is "moderately implemented and operationalized."<sup>40</sup>

Changes in administration have adversely affected the program and, to a large extent, the conservative bias of the current Arroyo administration has been held mainly responsible for this lack of continuity. For example, the Reproductive Health Care Act of 2002, which seeks to establish an integrated national policy and program on reproductive health, "was not passed into law because of the powerful lobby from the Catholic Church and prolife advocates."<sup>41</sup> The Church, especially since the rise to power of Gloria Macapagal Arroyo in 2001, has gained more influence over government policies and programs concerning population and reproductive health.

The government's health agenda is implemented by the Department of Health (DOH). In 1998, DOH issued a landmark policy directive which represented a major shift in the reproductive health and population programs of the Philippines in the last three decades. "From a narrow and conventional concept of fertility regulation and maternal health, reproductive health broadened and encompassed all aspects of sexuality and reproductive health needs throughout the life cycles of women and men."<sup>42</sup> As the International Conference on Population and Development (1984) put it, reproductive health is "a state of complete physical, mental and social well-being, and not merely the absence of disease or infirmity in all matters relating to the reproductive system and all its functions and processes..."<sup>43</sup> This broadened concept recognizes the importance of fundamental conditions that affect women's sexual development, health and child-bearing and includes their economic, social, cultural and educational environments.

## **Government Compliance with the Strategic Objectives of the BPA**

### **C1. Increase women's access throughout the life cycle to appropriate, affordable and quality health care, information and related services**

The Philippine health care system was devolved as early as 1991, following the passage of the Local Government Code, to ensure more accessible health services. Supported by 40 percent of total national government revenues, Local Government Units (LGUs) were given the responsibility of providing primary and secondary referral services, fiscal planning and management, and health outreach functions.

Integration of health services was intended to improve quality and reach. For sexual and reproductive health cases, this meant encouraging greater use of related services such as family planning, maternal and child health, education and counseling on sexual health. Adverse effects of devolution on rural health services in terms of delivery (particularly in safe motherhood and family planning), financing (some LGUs cut back on priority health areas) and the availability of qualified health personnel (and as a consequence, the quality of reproductive health care) were, however, noted. Changes in local leadership have also resulted in the disruption of programs, sometimes resulting in budget cuts in controversial areas such as family planning and sexually transmitted diseases (STDs).

An unintended consequence of devolution was the "disruption of technical linkages between the rural health units at the municipal level and the secondary referral facilities at the district and provincial levels."<sup>44</sup>

### **C2. Strengthen preventive programs that promote women's health**

The Report explained gains thus:

In 2000, foreign-funded health programs and projects under the DOH were unified and five-year projects now involve LGUs in comprehensive population, family planning, safe motherhood and child survival programs. Family planning (FP)

<sup>40</sup> Commission on Population. 2001. "Time to Act: Needs, Options, Decisions." State of the Philippine Population Report. Manila: POPCOM.

<sup>41</sup> Guerrero, S. H. 2005. "Women and Health." Philippine NGO Beijing+10 Report. February 2005. p.1

<sup>42</sup> Ibid., p. 2.

<sup>43</sup> This definition of reproductive health is contained in the Program of Action of the 1995 International Conference on Population and Development.

<sup>44</sup> Lakshminarayanan, Rama. 2003. "Decentralization and its Implications for Reproductive Health: The Philippine Experience." Reproductive Health Matters 11(21): 96-107.

programs have also been refocused to make FP available to all men and women of reproductive age. Adolescent sexuality and reproductive health issues have also been added, tapping NGOs as partners. Government and other foreign donors have supported school-and community-based campaigns on adolescent sexuality concerns, and the delivery of services through clinics and similar centers. In 2002 it was noted that some 122,166 teenagers gave birth—almost 78 percent for the first time.<sup>45</sup>

### **C3. Undertake gender-sensitive initiatives that address sexually-transmitted diseases, HIV/AIDS, and sexual and reproductive health issues**

According to the Report: "The DOH has identified the prevention and management of RTIs and HIV/AIDS as one of the priority areas in reproductive health. The Philippine AIDS Prevention and Control Act of 1998 also aims to promote public awareness of HIV/AIDS. A major project of DOH with UNFPA which crosscuts gender concerns specifically includes the prevention and management of STD/RTIs and the prevention of HIV/AIDS."<sup>46</sup>

### **C4. Promote research and disseminate information on women's health**

Academic institutions such as the UP Center for Women's Studies (UPCWS) and NGOs lead efforts to promote information advocacy and research on women's health. As the Report revealed, "Foreign donor agencies such as the UNFPA, the Packard Foundation and the Ford Foundation continue to support research, publications, information, education and communications programs on women's reproductive health."<sup>47</sup>

### **C5. Increase resources and monitor follow-up for women's health**

According to the Report, the government "has not fully met the strategic objective of increasing resources for health. Health accounted for only 2.08 percent of total government expenditures in 2001." It notes that "From 2001 to 2003, the government either did not release budgets or diverted budgets for family planning (especially artificial contraceptives) to other health programs. In 2003, about 50 million pesos were released to the Couples for Christ Medical Foundation

for natural family planning programs. All in all, the budget for family planning during the year shrank from P144 million to P40.7 million."<sup>48</sup>

A midterm progress report two years into the DOH-UNFPA project on reproductive health shows that "some 49 percent of all service delivery points in the nine provinces are now providing basic reproductive health care services of family planning, maternal health, and STD/HIV/AIDS prevention as a package."<sup>49</sup>

### **Gains, gaps and losses at a glance**

Gains:

- "Continued NGO militancy against the government's macroeconomic policies," particularly advocacy on the macro context of poverty and economic issues like globalization, unfair trade, and structural adjustment programs.
- "Working on shared issues" in spite of differing approaches, many women's groups have come together, creating powerful networks that have produced positive gains, such as the passage of pro-women legislation.
- "Offering some good practices," the past decade has seen the flourishing of good practices from women NGOs and community women's groups particular in the areas of capacity-building of women leaders, the establishment of innovative economic, health, and anti-VAW initiatives, environmental schemes and the like.
- "More women-friendly policy environment," especially as a result of relentless NGO advocacy which has been most evident in the areas of violence against women and children (VAWC) and institutional mechanisms for women.
- "Advances in gender mainstreaming." Certain policies added muscle to the gender mainstreaming efforts of the NCRFW, such as the adoption of the Philippine Plan for Gender-Responsive Development and the Framework Plan for Women.
- "Greater women's political participation" particularly in law-mandated bodies, peace monitoring groups, and similar councils. Women's elective positions, however marginal, are increasing.
- "Some support for women's agenda" as a result of GAD policies of government, the advocacy of women's movement activists, and the setting up of Women's Studies Programs in many areas and institutions of higher learning. Forms of support include the passage of women or GAD codes, mechanisms, and programs in a few provinces, towns and cities.
- "Some improvements in service delivery," albeit small, toward securing social protection for

<sup>45</sup> NCRFW. 2004. "State of the Filipino Women Report. 2001-2003."

<sup>46</sup> Guerrero, S. H. 2005. "Women and Health." Philippine NGO Beijing+10 Report. February 2005. p. 3.

<sup>47</sup> Ibid., p. 4.

<sup>48</sup> Ibid., p. 4.

<sup>49</sup> Ibid., p. 4.

informal sector workers (many of whom are women) and provision of credit resources for women, to name a few.

- "Improvement in some aspects of women's and girls lives", such as increased access to education by girls (and boys), more households with potable water, and a wider variety of jobs available to young, educated women (and men).

The Report, however, tempers the gains by stating that none of these comes as "unqualified success."

### Gaps and losses

- "Pro-women policies and programs are undermined by government's adherence to economic and trade liberalization, privatization, deregulation, aggressive exportation of labor, and anti-people environment policy."

- "The persistent fiscal crisis has likewise eroded GAD efforts and social sector budgets and inroads that were made to improve people's well-being."

- "Continuing destruction of the Philippine environment" is compromising the safety and security of everyone, but more particularly the livelihood base of women in rural areas and in indigenous communities.

- "Weak or lack of political will to implement pro-women policies" which, for example, has resulted in budgets not being allocated, released, or in the case of women's health, re-directed. Lack of monitoring or lack of sex-disaggregated data has also undermined the implementation of pro-women policies.

- "Retreat from support for women's reproductive health programs" is probably the most notable loss that the women's cause has suffered in the past four or five years, with the current government reneging on its commitment to support women's reproductive health.

- "Lack of political influence by NCRFW" has hampered its ability to influence the overall development agenda of government.

- "Limited coverage of women's programs," which is generally micro in scale and focus, offers limited chances of sustainability. The Report states that microfinance has become commercialized and rarely is connected to the structural problems affecting poor women.

- "Some retreats or losses in the life of women and girls are noted," particularly in the following areas: the persistence of high maternal mortality rates; the total fertility rates continuing to exceed women's desired fertility; low-quality education which compromises the future of girls and boys and the continuing poor fit between education and employment, and the de-skilling of women working overseas. Sexism continues, especially in media, the workplace, and others, while indigenous women and rural women continue to be exposed to the military and development aggression.<sup>50</sup>

<sup>50</sup> A more detailed discussion of the gaps, gains and losses can be found in Ilo, Jeanne Frances I. and Rosalinda Pineda Ofreneo. "Synthesis and Conclusions". Philippine NGO Beijing+10 Report. February 2005. pp. 1-3.